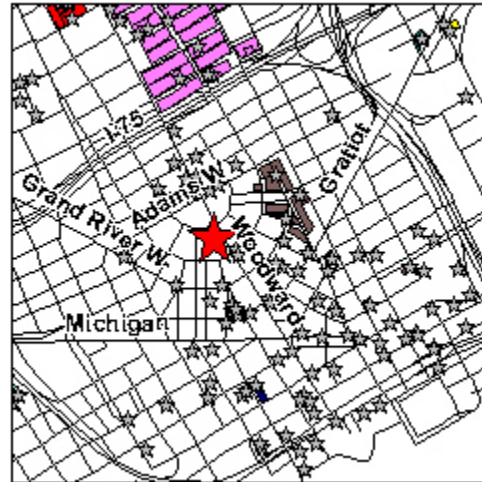


## **David Whitney Building**

1553 Woodward

Local                    ✓        7/7/00  
State  
State Marker  
National



### **Historic overview:**

The David Whitney Building is one of the key buildings forming the wall defining Grand Circus Park. It is also one of only three surviving buildings in Detroit credited to the Chicago architectural firm of Daniel H. Burnham and Company, and one of only two buildings in Detroit which contain dramatic skylight-covered interior atrium lobbies.

Daniel Burnham, a Chicago architect, was one of the most prestigious designers of skyscrapers by the year 1900. The emergence of the skyscraper as a uniquely American building type was influenced by commercial development in Chicago. Burnham was also chief consulting architect for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The precedent set at the World Fair greatly influenced the development of the modern city as the chief practitioner and promoter for the City Beautiful movement.

The David Whitney Building is named in honor of David Whitney, Jr. (1830-1900), a man significant in the history of Detroit's commercial and industrial development. He was a lumber baron, shipping magnate, landholder, and one of Detroit's wealthiest men at the turn of the century. In the 1890s his real estate holdings in Detroit and Wayne County alone were estimated at \$2 million, and his total wealth was estimated at between \$7-10 million. The Whitney Building, complete with interior courtyard, opened in 1915. It was billed as an exclusive shopping center equivocal to those found in New York; upper stories were occupied as offices, primarily doctors and dentists. The building underwent drastic modification to its exterior in 1959. The removal of the cornice, parapet and terra cotta detail resulted in an appearance that was more modern but less elegant. The Whitney family sold the building in 1965. Since, it has struggled with tenant loss, and finally complete vacancy in the late 1990s.

